

# **Region 6 (King County) Homeland Security Strategic Planning Workshop: *Summary of Key Decisions and Discussion***

## **Introduction**

Washington State Homeland Security Region 6 has requested that ICF Consulting assist with the development of a Regional Homeland Security Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan will primarily address homeland security concerns, including weapons of mass destruction, but will also address other hazards such as earthquakes and hazardous materials catastrophes. The Plan will present a regional approach to preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from, disasters and emergencies.

The Plan will be developed in coordination with stakeholders throughout the Region. The strategic planning process will enable the Region to develop both short and long term strategies for implementing an efficient and effective approach to homeland security that stresses regional collaboration. The Plan will outline approaches to enhancing intra-region preparedness over the next five years through effective use of existing and new resources, identification of opportunities, and the setting of priorities.

On March 5, 2004, 25 key stakeholders participated in a strategic planning workshop. The main objectives for this workshop were to:

- ☑ Obtain agreement and consensus on the purpose and function of the Region 6 Homeland Security Strategic Plan;
- ☑ Develop a common vision for the Region: i.e., “what we want Region 6 to look like in 5 years;”
- ☑ Validate findings of stakeholder interviews and plan review;
- ☑ Agree upon key regional strategic issues to be addressed in the Strategic Plan; and,
- ☑ Begin discussion of goals and strategies that will move stakeholders toward achieving the vision

## **Agenda**

The agenda followed the above meeting objectives. The first item on the agenda was a Plenary Session dedicated to reviewing the strategic planning process. The participants were then separated into three small work groups to discuss their vision for the regional planning process and elements that should be included in the Strategic Plan Vision Statement. The entire workgroup then reconvened to hear the small group reports, and to hear and comment upon ICF’s initial findings from the stakeholder interviews and plans review. The workgroup then broke up into smaller groups again to review, validate, and expand upon ICF’s initial analysis of Region 6’s strategic issues and challenges. By the end of the day, the workgroup had laid out the framework for the Region 6 Homeland Security Strategic Plan.

### **Agenda**

- i. Welcome and Introductions
- ii. The Region 6 Homeland Security Strategic Planning Process
- iii. Vision for the Future of the Region
- iv. Brief Report on Phase I Findings from Stakeholder Interviews and the Plans Review
- v. Overview and Discussion of Initial Key Strategic Issues Identified from Phase 1
- vi. Review of What We Heard and Summarize Progress Made on Vision for the Region, Strategic Issues, and Other Key Points

## Workshop Topics

### | *Strategic Planning Process Overview*

This session provided participants with an overview of the Strategic Plan project, which began in November of 2003. The plan will be developed and implemented in five phases by May/June 2004. An evaluation of the Strategic Plan to ensure that it is achieving its objectives will occur six months after Plan implementation, which is expected to be in November of 2004. The Strategic Plan will be revised as necessary.

The first phase of the project consisted of interviewing key stakeholders, along with reviewing emergency response plans and assessments, relevant federal, state, and local legislation, and the Washington State strategic plan. The Region 6 Strategic Plan must align with the Washington State plan and relevant federal plans and grant programs.

The workgroup discussion raised some issues that may impact plan design and implementation: How will this plan interface with the UASI planning process? What is the relationship between the Region and the City of Seattle in the context of the plan? These issues will need to be addressed by key stakeholders as the plan development progresses.

### | *Vision for the Future*

The workgroup was split into three smaller groups. Each group was asked to complete the sentence “*According to our Vision for the future, in five years Region 6 will...*” and to describe the characteristics of a successful strategic plan.

The workgroups responded that they would like Region 6 to have achieved the following in five years:

- The Region will be a true community with very low political and jurisdictional barriers to achieving a high level of all-hazards preparation.
- Jurisdictions, special purpose districts, and organizations will routinely conduct training, exercises, and drills together.
- The Region will have effective communications, defined as those who need to know will be informed and will have access to critical information to enable good decision making before, during, and after an incident.
- Agencies and organizations will coordinate effectively and appropriate command structures will be in place to respond to incidents.
- The Region will have successfully engaged the community, and non-traditional partners like hospitals, NGOs, and the private sector will be more involved in planning and preparedness activities, will be educated about hazards, and will understand their responsibilities.

The Strategic Plan must have the following characteristics for it to be successful. The plan must:

- Be flexible and resilient enough to weather changes in political and public support, demographics, and funding availability and sources;
- Be simple, easily understood, and concise;
- Build trust between jurisdictions and encourage open, honest communication; and

- Clearly define priorities for the Region.

### ***Findings from the Plans Review and Stakeholder Interviews***

As part of the project's Phase 1, "Assessment of the Current Environment," the ICF Team evaluated over 29 emergency management plans, planning guides, and assessments and interviewed over 60 key stakeholders. Using the data contained within the plans, together with data gathered from interviewing subject matter experts, a foundation can be created for structuring where Region 6 would like to be in the short-term (two to five years) and the long-term (5 to 10 years).

The review of existing plans identified three major issues:

- Coordinated regional planning should clearly state priorities and include accountability measures. Many of the regional and statewide plans include a comprehensive detailed listing of challenges, planning goals and objectives. However, these lists are not prioritized. Also, there is no timeline for execution or measures of progress.
- A summary assessment of regional assets, needs, threats and vulnerabilities is needed. An inventory of current response assets and capabilities also is needed to determine where there may be unnecessary duplication and where there are gaps.
- Regional response plans must be tested to identify strengths and weaknesses and to solidify partnerships.

ICF interviewed over 60 key stakeholders within the Region. Some common issues that were frequently mentioned were:

- The threats that are most probable include natural hazards, accidents and terrorism.
- Regional strengths include a collaborative culture, a beginning focus on regional collaboration, a progressive EM community, strong and well-practiced first responders, coordination with the private sector, the existence of the Regional Disaster Plan, communication (NW WARN) and the Incident Command System. There is a strong sense of interdependence and of the importance of regional response.
- Challenges include lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, incomplete understanding/disagreement about the degree of terrorist threat, geography, complex government structure, communication and coordination within the public sector and with the private sector, and the ability of public health to respond to events.

### ***Initial Analysis on Strategic Issues and Challenges***

ICF's initial analysis of the interview responses and relevant plans raised six strategic issues. Strategic issues are defined as categories of potential goals (desired outcomes). The large group broke into three smaller groups to discuss a subset of these issues and present finding back to the larger group.

*Coordinated Regional Preparedness and Response.* This was an overarching theme that encompasses the primary goal of the entire strategic planning exercise. Many of the individuals interviewed stated a need to commit to planning and responding to emergencies *as a Region*. By establishing regional priorities, building strong individual agencies and creating an effective coordination system, a regional response across jurisdictions and disciplines and by tribal, public, private and volunteer entities will be most effective in facing emergencies of significance.

All three of the smaller workgroups agreed that a “fair and equitable” distribution of resources and funding does not necessarily fit in with regional approach. That is, some jurisdictions may not receive the same level of funding as their neighbors. The group stated that a coordinated regional approach would mean that resources and funding are allocated according to what is best for the Region. Participants concluded that the process for distribution of funds and resources should be transparent and those involved should openly and honestly communicate their needs and capabilities.

The workgroups also stressed the importance of having widespread, long-term support from elected officials (present and future), the not-for-profit and private sectors, and the citizens of the Region. Participants believe that without widespread, long-term support, funding for programs will dry-up. Accordingly, they stated that widespread support will only come from effective outreach and public education programs.

Participants further concluded that while implementing a regional approach, decision-makers should be cognizant of not establishing minimum standards that may be seen as unfunded mandates. As an example, the first step should be to determine the capabilities of each entity, and determine what needs could be filled through regional sharing of assets and resources and what needs require additional resources and attention.

All agreed that building trust and establishing professional relationships that cross jurisdictional lines is the foundation of a successful regional approach. Social activities, such as police and fire baseball leagues, could be used to encourage communication among groups.

*Summary Assessment and Addressing of Regional Assets, Needs, Threats and Vulnerabilities.* Both the plans review and the interviews demonstrated a need to assess and summarize regional threats and vulnerabilities, and to catalog public and private sector assets and capabilities. This information is necessary to identify resource gaps. The workgroups mentioned that other resource assessments have been done, but that some of these assessments may be out of date and/or the information has not been shared. The workgroup acknowledged the sensitive nature of this information and the need for a regional system for sharing sensitive information.

*Sustainable Funding.* Sufficient resources must be allocated at the regional and local level to allow agencies to meet the demands placed upon them, particularly with regard to planning. Local governments in King County are currently very fiscally constrained. Staff levels have remained constant or have decreased while demands have increased. Funding sources and requirements are continuously changing with little assurance of long-term sustainable funding. The workgroup emphasized the need to find stable regional and local funding sources that can sustain programs. The business case for emergency management and homeland security programs must be made. The general public, the private and non-for-profit sectors, and elected officials must be frequently informed about the importance of these programs in order to garner support.

*Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG).* Both the plans review and the interviews demonstrated that COOP and COG planning is generally weak among jurisdictions in the Region. COOP and COG planning should incorporate private sector assets and responsibilities since many critical infrastructure services are owned and operated by the private sector. Basic COOP and COG planning issues need to be addressed. For example, consistent planning guides and standards that address identification and prioritization of critical services should be developed.

*Communication among Agencies, Organizations, Jurisdictions, and Disciplines.* Critical information needs to be effectively transmitted to relevant parties for successful planning and response. Systems and standard operating procedures for sharing information among all parties at all levels need to be developed.

Insufficient protocols exist for the sharing of sensitive information in particular. Reliable and redundant intra- and inter-agency communications systems and technology is a critical need. The system will be only as good as those who use it. Emergency responders should frequently participate in exercises using the communication system and procedures to ensure that they fully understand the system and how to use the technology. Communication programs should specify procedures and funding for maintaining and updating the equipment.

*Emergency Preparedness and Response – Training and Exercising.* An on-going training program is needed. Exercises can be used to test plans, identify gaps and assumptions, and build relationships across jurisdictions and disciplines. Such exercises must be appropriately resourced, creating incentives for agencies to participate. Volunteer organizations, non-profits, and the private sector should be encouraged to participate in these exercises. The workgroup cautioned against establishing minimum standards for training and exercising. Minimum standards may be viewed as an unfunded mandate.

*Public Information and Outreach.* Informing the public of the importance of sustainable emergency management and homeland security programs improves regional preparedness and ensures long-term support. A regional outreach strategy is needed to ensure the public does not receive conflicting messages. We should learn to work with the television, radio, and print media representatives better and utilize their distribution capabilities to inform the public. The workgroup acknowledged that, while public outreach is one of the most important activities that emergency managers can do, it is also one of the first areas to get cut when funds are scarce. New low-cost outreach methods must be leveraged; such as working with more community groups such as churches and schools. Regional procedures for sharing information with the public during an emergency are also needed.

## **Next Steps**

ICF will develop a draft Strategic Plan based on the information provided at the workshop, and present it at a second strategic planning session that will be held in May. ICF will contact some of the workshop participants prior to the second planning session to share initial ideas and validate results.

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